

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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P R 220910Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 929
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3755

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, SN
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FIRST CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER; US-ASEAN
MINISTERIALS; ASEAN-SRV RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY: DURING MY FIRST CALL ON THE FOREIGN
MINISTER, HE EXPRESSED FULL SATISFACTION WITH THE
OUTCOME OF THE US-ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETINGS AND
HIS OWN PART IN THEM. HE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE
OF THE US'S REASSERTING ITS INTEREST IN SOUTHEAST
ASIA BY HELPING ASEAN TO BECOME A GOOD EXAMPLE OF
THE SUCCESS OF NON-COMMUNIST ECONOMIC SYSTEMS. HE
DESCRIBED A MEETING WITH AN SRV OFFICIAL IN WHICH THE
LATTER SOUNDED HIM OUT ABOUT ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL
RELATIONS AND ABOUT VIETNAM'S JOINING ASEAN (RAJA
PROPOSED A FIRST STEP OF ESTABLISHING TRADE MISSIONS
AND ASKED POINTED QUESTIONS ABOUT SRV INTENTIONS
VIS-A-VIS ASEAN COUNTRIES). ON INDIVIDUAL REFUGEES,
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RAJA EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR FINDING WAYS OF RESETTLING
THEM; HE DID NOT INDICATE A GOS POSITION ON THE
PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON REFUGEES. HE
NOTED THAT SINGAPORE DID NOT SEND A DELEGATION TO THE
WORLD CONFERENCE ON RACISM. END SUMMARY

2. I PAID MY FIRST CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER

RAJARATNAM ON AUGUST 17, SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN FROM THE U.S. AND THE US-ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETINGS. RAJA SEEMED HIGHLY PLEASED WITH THE RESULTS OF MEETINGS AND THE PART HE PLAYED IN FOCUSING ATTENTION ON THE POLITICAL SIDE OF THE US-ASEAN RELATIONSHIP. HE WAS ESPECIALLY GRATIFIED WITH THE EXCELLENT MANAGEMENT OF THE MEETINGS AND THE TOP-LEVEL ATTENTION PAID TO ASEAN MINISTERS. HE FOUND THE PRESIDENT WARM AND PERSONABLE AND NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD CHATTED BRIEFLY WITH HIM ABOUT MY RECENT APPOINTMENT AS AMBASSADOR. RAJA STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF FURTHER DEVELOPING THE US-ASEAN RELATIONSHIP. WHEN I SAID THAT HE HAD IN HIS SPEECHES VERY MUCH IMPRESSED MY OWN GOVERNMENT AS A SPOKESMAN FOR THE NON-COMMUNIST POINT OF VIEW IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, RAJA SPENT SOME TIME GOING OVER WITH ME IN DETAIL SOME OF THE POINTS HE HAD MADE IN THE SPEECHES.

3. RAJA REITERATED HIS THESIS THAT THE US SHOULD REASSERT ITS INTEREST IN SE ASIA BY SUPPORTING ASEAN ECONOMICALLY NOW WHILE IT IS IN A HEALTHY STAGE OF PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT AND THE INDOCHINESE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES ARE CAUGHT UP IN QUARRELS AND INTERNAL STRIFE; THE U.S. SHOULD NOT WAIT UNTIL THERE WERE FIRES IN SE ASIA THAT HAD TO BE PUT OUT. HE ALSO DEVELOPED

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THE "YOUR SIDE OF THE FENCE" THEME OF HIS NATIONAL PRESS CLUB SPEECH, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT SINGAPORE'S INTERESTS IN THE US-ASEAN RELATIONSHIP ARE PRIMARILY POLITICAL (ALTHOUGH ECONOMIC BENEFITS WOULD BE MORE THAN WELCOME). HE BRIEFLY NOTED THAT NOT ALL OF HIS ASEAN COLLEAGUES WERE PLEASED WITH HIS SPEECHES.

4. THE MOST INTERESTING PART OF OUR CONVERSATION, GROWING OUT OF THAT ON US-ASEAN RELATIONS, WAS RAJA'S COMMENTS ON ASEAN'S RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM. HE WRONGLY DESCRIBED THE "NATURAL CIRCLE OF EVENTS" BY WHICH MOST OF THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES FIRST OPPOSED ASEAN, THEN COLDLY TOLERATED IT AND HAVE NOW COME TO RECOGNIZE AND EVEN SUPPORT IT AS A REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROUPING. INTERESTINGLY, RAJA IN HIS COMMENTS SPOKE OF ONLY TWO SUPER-POWERS, LEAVING THE PRC OUT.

5. VIETNAM, HE SAID, IS GOING THROUGH SOME FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES AND IS LOOKING FOR SUPPORT ABROAD TO OFFSET SOVIET INFLUENCE. THE VIETNAMESE HAVE ALSO BEGUN TO SEE THAT THEIR WAY OF LIFE IS "NOT

AS GOOD AS ASEAN'S" AND "WE KNOW THEY ARE LOOKING ELSEWHERE THAN THE SOVIET UNION FOR HELP WITH THEIR PROBLEMS." HE STRONGLY BELIEVES THAT ASEAN AND OTHER NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES SHOULD LET VIETNAM "PLUG IN" TO THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD ECONOMY IF WE WANT THEM TO TURN AWAY FROM THEIR DANGEROUSLY INWARD-LOOKING EXTREMIST DOMESTIC POLICIES AND HEAVY DEPENDENCE ON THE SOVIETS. HE SEES THE NEXT THREE OR FOUR YEARS AS CRITICAL IN THIS RESPECT AND EXPOSURE TO A "BETTER WAY OF LIFE" AS A PRIMARY FACTOR THAT MIGHT CHANGE ATTITUDES.

6. RAJA THEN RECOUNTED THAT HE HAD TOLD AN SRV OFFICIAL RECENTLY (PROBABLY PHAN HIEN) WHEN ASKED
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ABOUT ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL RELATIONS, THAT THE FIRST STEP SHOULD BE SETTING UP TRADE MISSIONS IN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND THAT THIS WILL BE DONE. RAJA IMPLIED THAT THE SRV OFFICIAL HAD SOUNDED HIM OUT ON VIETNAM'S JOINING ASEAN, AND SAID HE HAD FRANKLY ASKED WHETHER VIETNAM COULD JOIN ASEAN AND GIVE UP ITS OBJECTIVES OF SPREADING COMMUNISM TO OTHER COUNTRIES. COULD THE SRV, GIVEN THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ITS IDEOLOGY AND THAT OF ASEAN, "SIGN OFF" ON NON-INTERVENTION IN ASEAN COUNTRIES' DOMESTIC AFFAIRS? RAJA NOTED THAT HE GOT NO SATISFACTORY ANSWER AND THAT HE WAS NOT GOING TO SAY ANYTHING PUBLICLY ABOUT THIS EXCHANGE. HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE GOS WOULD OPPOSE VIETNAM'S ADMISSION TO ASEAN EVEN WHILE IT FAVORS DEVELOPING TRADE RELATIONS, PARTLY FOR THE POLITICAL PURPOSES SUGGESTED ABOVE. RAJA DID NOT RAISE THE SUBJECT OF US-SRV RELATIONS.

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ACTION EA-06

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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3755

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7. ON OTHER SUBJECT, I HANDED RAJA AN AIDE
MEMOIRE ON THE CONFERENCE ON RACISM (STATE 204787) HE MERELY
NOTED THAT SINGAPORE IS NOT ATTENDING. I ALSO GAVE HIM
EMBASSY BANGKOK'S EXCELLENT ANALYSIS OF INDOCHINESE
REFUGEE DEBRIEFINGS, FOR WHICH HE WAS VERY GRATEFUL
(STATE 206312). ON REFUGEES, RAJA NOTED THAT THE SUBJECT HAD
BEEN USEFULLY DISCUSSED IN WASHINGTON AND THAT IT IS URGENT
THAT EVERYTHING POSSIBLE BE DONE TO GET THE REFUGEES RESETTLED.
I MENTIONED THE POSSIBLE INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE CONFERENCE,
BUT HE DID NOT INDICATE ANY GOS POSITION ON THE CONFERENCE.

8. COMMENT: I AM SURE THAT MY VERY CORDIAL RECEPTION BY THE
FOREIGN MINISTER REFLECTS HIS SATISFACTION WITH THE US-ASEAN
MINISTERIAL MEETINGS. BEYOND THAT, I WAS HAPPY TO SEE THE
CLOSE AND CONFIDENTIAL RELATIONSHIP THAT RAJA SEEMS TO WISH
TO MAINTAIN WITH THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR HERE. I WAS STRUCK
BY HIS FORTHRIGHT AND CLEAR-EYED PERCEPTION OF THE INTER-
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE US-ASEAN CONNECTION ON ONE HAND AND
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THE ASEAN-INDOCHINESE CONNECTION ON THE OTHER. WHILE I HAD BEEN
AWARE OF THE GOS'S KEEN INTEREST IN A STRONG U.S. PRESENCE
IN SE ASIA, IT WAS EDUCATIONAL TO LISTEN TO RAJA'S PRESCRIPTION
FOR HOW TO "CIVILIZE" VIETNAM BY PLUGGING IT INTO THE NON-
COMMUNIST ECONOMIC SYSTEM. HE SEEMS TO ME TO MAKE EMINENTLY GOOD
SENSE.
KNEIP

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